

A CLASS ACT

Doctoral Students Making History at Cal Poly

By Carol Pendergast



(Left to right) Holly Edds, Jim Brescia, Patty Grady, Janice Wellman, Lynn Lamb. (Photo by Tom Hertz)

Six students are making history at Cal Poly. In their 40s and 50s and with demanding full-time careers, they are in their second year of the Cal Poly-UC Santa Barbara joint doctoral program in Educational Leadership and Administration. It's been a challenge, they say, juggling the demands of their professional and personal lives.

Holly Edds, principal of Joe Nightingale Elementary School in the Orcutt Union School District, found a dual challenge in starting the doctoral program and assuming a new position. "I'm trying to find a balance in my life and have given myself permission to spend the year learning," she noted.

Jan Wellman, resource teacher at Nipomo and Dana elementary schools, explained that she researched many options that included significant travel or expense or both. She says she chose the program because it is "offered by two top institutions and designed for practitioners."

The first year of the program is taught at UCSB and provides the research and methodological base. During the second year, offered at Cal Poly, method is tested using individual work environments. The third year is spent writing the thesis.

The program is creating a new graduate culture, where students blend Cal Poly's

for improved schools," he said.

The doctoral thesis will allow these future leaders to tackle specific issues in their educational settings. Patty Grady, assistant principal at Fesler Junior High School in Santa Maria, is developing a prevention program at the middle-school level to decrease high-school dropout rates.

Lynn Lamb, elementary school teacher at Branch Elementary in the Lucia Mar Unified School District, is studying the inclusion of special education students in classrooms and support needed by teachers.

"I'm interested in how small school districts successfully cope with declining enrollment," noted Jim Brescia, principal of St. Rose Catholic School in Paso Robles.

Kevin Bontenbal, instructional technology librarian at Cuesta College and the only student from higher education, will test and assess the effectiveness of community-college-degree programs to develop a profile of best practices. "I hope to enable Cuesta and other community colleges to implement reliable models of student learning and assessment."

The students are uniformly enthusiastic about their pioneering experience in the

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mission of learn by doing with the strong research traditions of UCSB, according to Jim Gentilucci, Cal Poly associate professor of education and co-director of the doctoral program.

He hopes that this research-practice nexus will create new answers to educational problems that have plagued schools for decades. "We are creating roles for 'teacher leaders' who will work with administrators to become 'change agents'

joint doctoral program. For classroom teacher Lamb, the program provides a broader view of education, as well as opportunities to rethink directions in the classroom and in her own professional development.

"This historic, field-based program will have a significant impact on our local and statewide educational communities," said Bonnie Konopak, dean of the College of Education. ■